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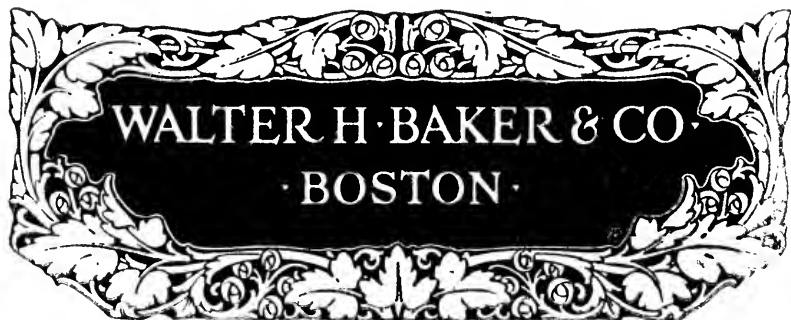
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Isosceles

A Play in One Act

By

WALTER BEN HARE

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BOSTON

WALTER H. BAKER & CO.

1917

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Isosceles

CHARACTERS

JIM LYONS
PAUL VERDIER.
REBA LYONS.



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Isosceles

SCENE.—*An elaborate living-room of an apartment house in a large city in the middle west. The decorations and hangings are in shades of gold and brown. Library table stands down R.; elaborate reclining chairs R. C. and down L. To the left of this latter chair and near the L. I E. there is a nook, closed on three sides and open in front, used as a telephone booth. Near the chair down L. is a taborette on which lies a fancy box containing the remains of five pounds of chocolates, and a vanity bag. Center door entrance with hall visible beyond. Entrance R. 2 with practical door to slam. Bay-window in flat at L. Library furniture and palms ad libitum. Time, mid-afternoon. Lights on full throughout the play.*

(*At rise, REBA LYONS is discovered lolling in easy chair down L. She is a large, beautiful woman with dull gold hair and, although she is not stout, ten years hence, when she will be forty, there is every evidence that she will be a seeker after the specialists. She is dressed in the skirt of an old gold coat-suit. The coat has been removed, however, and she is taking every comfort in a lace upper-garment with elbow sleeves and cut slightly low in the neck. She opens the vanity bag and lazily takes out a small hand mirror. She regards her image thoughtfully and, evidently pleased with the effect, smiles pleasantly. She replaces the mirror in the bag, and carefully selecting a huge chocolate from the box leans back and nibbles daintily. Electric bell rings. Steps are heard and then an outer door (not visible) is opened and closed. REBA does not change her position. Slight pause and then the voice of PAUL VERDIER is heard at back R.)*

VERD. Thank you, Crane. (*He enters C. D. He is a handsome young chap of about twenty-six, slim and dark,*

rather carelessly dressed with a flowing black crêpe Windsor tie. He carries a cluster of violets. REBA, still lolling down L., smiles and holds out her hand. VERD. grasps it eagerly.) Reba! Alone? (*Kisses her hand.*) Where's your husband?

REBA. I haven't seen him to day. He's out with the Van Sickle crowd again. He knows the very thought of that boat gives me the *mal de mer*. That's the reason he's so fond of it.

VERD. How beautiful you are to day. You are my sun, Reba, my warm golden sun shining through the fog of the world's indifference. All afternoon I've been walking in the cold mist waiting for this moment, longing for the warmth of your smile, the gleam of your wonderful hair.

(*He attempts to take her in his arms.*)

REBA. I wish you wouldn't, Paul. I'm so unhappy to-day.

VERD. Unhappy? You should never be unhappy. Your whole life, every moment, should be one uninterrupted joy.

REBA (*sighing contentedly*). You are so sympathetic. You understand my temperament.

VERD. See, I have brought you a little bunch of violets. I found them underneath a bench in the park. They had been neglected by the gardener, forgotten. They typified you. Alone, neglected, abused by—

REBA. No, he doesn't abuse me. (*Petulantly.*) But he thinks he has a perfect right to do as he pleases with my money. I won't stand that. He bought twenty shares of Tarantula last week directly against poppy's advice. Jim never had a business head. And poppy—well, Israel Cohan doesn't often make mistakes. Jim thinks he knows it all. I've put a stop to it, though. After this I'll make my own investments.

(*Eats a chocolate rather viciously.*)

VERD. Can't you see, Reba, that a man like Jim Lyons could never understand you, never appreciate your finer nature or help you realize your beautiful ideals?

REBA. I know it. Poppy always says that as far as money is concerned I'm the man of the family.

VERD. And then your dreams, your purple dreams waiting to be quickened into thought. Can he appreciate your dreams?

REBA. He can't appreciate my temperament. He doesn't like music or poetry or sculpture. His only ambition is to be funny, to write a few foolish songs and fifty pages of trash and

call it musical comedy. (*Mournfully.*) Then he reads it to me. (*Sniffs.*) Oh, Paul, even you don't realize all I suffer.

VERD. I know, I know. Some day when the white violets are blooming, and our own south wind calling gently, magnolia-throated, I'm going to drive you away in your car and we'll mix with the sweet air and white wind in the Land of Love's Delight. It's a wonderful country, Reba, of life—the bright warm life of eternal youth and love. (*REBA selects a very large chocolate and begins to nibble as he encircles her with his arm.*) And we'll live there together, just you and I, with never a thought of the world outside. You'll go with me, dear heart? Say that you'll go.

(His face is very close to hers and she does not resist as he, with passionate eagerness, attempts to press his lips on hers. Suddenly she chews. Her mouth is filled with chocolate. He draws away and, disengaging himself gently, takes the box of chocolates from her and crossing to the other side of the stage, puts it on the table. She watches him languidly.)

REBA. It is not right for you to talk to a married woman like that.

VERD. (*at c.*). You have no right to be married without your soul-mate's love.

REBA. How do you know that Jim doesn't love me?

VERD. By his every attitude, his neglect. Where is he now? Out on the lake with his men friends, maybe with ladies.

REBA. No, Jim doesn't care for other women.

VERD. Well, he neglects you. He should be here to devote every second of his time to you, to idolize you by day, dream of you by night.

REBA (*sighing*). You understand me so well.

(Misses the chocolates and looks for them.)

VERD. This can't go on any longer. My devotion to you has never changed. I came here at your husband's invitation determined to steel my heart against its love for you. I saw you yesterday for the first time in five years. You were the golden incarnation of all my youthful dreams. You cared for me once, Reba. You still care for me. You are mine. Mine now and for all eternity.

(*He starts to embrace her. She rises.*)

REBA. Don't, Paul, don't. You take advantage of my temperament. But it's all true. My husband does neglect me. Me! To whom he owes all his success. I paid his bills when I married him, I produced his first play, yes—and lost money on it, too. Eight thousand dollars. He's not even grateful for what I have done. Just because I don't laugh at his stupid jokes, he neglects me. And I don't move in any better society now than I did before. He doesn't run with his own set, but has taken up lately with a lot of men—actors and writers and musicians who never care for society. (*With increasing intensity.*) He neglects me. He's a strange man whom I don't know. I'm just a source of money supply. I'm a doll, a plaything! I'm like Mrs. Fiske in the Doll's House. Jim doesn't appreciate me. (*Crosses to table R. and takes up box of chocolates dramatically.*) He's gone too far—it's all gone too far. Do you see that door, Paul Verdier? (*Points to practical door.*) That's just like Mrs. Fiske's door in the play. (*Opens door.*) I'm going to open it like that some day and go through, just like she did. And slam it. (*Slams it.*) I'll leave him. (*Sinks in chair R. C. and eats chocolate.*)

VERD. (*crossing to her eagerly.*) And come with me. We'll go to the Land of the Sleeping Waters and float upon the sea's breast of blue and turquoise. In the old days I worshipped you —

REBA. You left me. You didn't show this appreciation of my temperament then.

VERD. I was poor. How poor even you never suspected. Do you remember the garden with the lily pond at Magnolia Hall where you used to play with your dolls? I would come to the iron fence and watch you, a golden princess, in a garden of enchantment. Then the night we met —

REBA. The Charity Ball. I cut six dances for you.

VERD. The old boat-house, the silver crescent moon kissing the lake, the south wind kissing the jessamine —

REBA. And you kissing me —

VERD. I learned to love the world that night. You gave me your heart with your kisses.

REBA. It was my temperament.

VERD. It was your self. Your golden responsive self. Then the moon drifted from the lake and the wind drifted from the jessamine —

REBA. And you drifted from me.

VERD. The next day I was sane. What had I, Paul Verdier, penniless, son of old drunken Joe Verdier, to do with Reba Cohan the richest girl of the Carolinas? People said that you were engaged to Jim. Everything seemed hopeless. I was a coward and left you. But now that I see you again, Reba, I want you. Love must conquer all. Give me a chance. Say you'll go with me.

(Sits on the arm of her chair.)

REBA *(after a slight pause throws her arms around his neck)*. Paul! *(She kisses him.)*

Enter JIM LYONS, C. D., hurriedly.

JIM *(standing fixed at c. at the scene; then speaks in a threatening voice)*. Reba!

REBA. Jim! My God!

(Mechanically eats a chocolate.)

JIM *(strained voice)*. Go to your room. Get out. I want to speak to this—cur—alone.

REBA. I won't do it. You forget yourself, Jim Lyons. How dare you speak to me like that? Whose apartments are these? If you have anything to say, say it here and now.

(She has risen and confronts him R. C. VERD. crosses down R.)

JIM. Anything to say? Do you think I am going to be silent? Do you think that I am going to stand here and let this snake that I have warmed at my hearth-fire make love to my wife? *(VERD. makes movement toward him; REBA intercepts him.)* I introduced you into my house as a friend and return and find my wife in your arms. What have you to say for yourself? *(Very loud.)*

VERD. *(confronting him angrily. REBA sinks in chair and hides face in hands, but peeks through fingers)*. I—I'll tell you—

JIM. Don't speak. Don't try to explain anything. I want no explanations. We'll not quarrel and fight like a couple of street arabs. I'll not throw you down the stairs. But there

must be a decision made at once. (VERD. *shrugs shoulders and crosses to L. I E.*) Reba, do you love this man?

REBA (*raising head*). I——

JIM (*quickly interrupting*). You do. I see it in your eyes. You, the only woman in the world I ever loved. (*Brokenly.*) Reba, Reba, you've broken my heart.

REBA (*sniffing*). Don't, Jim, don't.

JIM. Go with him. If I can't have your heart, your love and your life, for God's sake go and leave me alone. I know what it is to be alone. But after you have gone—after you have deserted me, I'll go to the dogs as fast as I can. Sometimes I'll dream of the woman who once was mine, of the home I have lost——

REBA (*sobbing*). I can't bear it, Jim, I can't bear it. I'll not leave you. I'll not go.

(*Rises and clings to him.*)

JIM (*quickly*). Yes, you will. Do you think that I want you when you love another man? Out of my sight. I've done with you forever.

(*Sinks in chair and buries his face in arms.*)

VERD. Do you hear him, Reba? He casts you off.

JIM. I found you in his arms. You, the woman I loved and trusted, on whose honor I would have staked my life. Go!

REBA. You—want—me—to—go?

VERD. Come!

REBA. I will go. I'll leave you, Jim Lyons. I'll go. No man can talk about my honor. [*Exit, R., banging door.*]

VERD. (*after a pause*). I suppose you will consent to a divorce?

JIM. Don't talk to me. It's all I can do to keep calm. You've won and I've lost. Take her and go.

VERD. (*crossing to hall and getting hat, then coming suddenly down c.*) Jim Lyons, why did you ever ask me to come here?

JIM (*looking up quickly; slight pause*). That's what I ask myself, why?

VERD. You knew that I loved your wife—that I understood her temperament. You neglected her——

JIM (*with a sneer*). Why didn't you try to win her five years ago?

VERD. Five years ago I was poor and she was rich —

JIM (*drily*). She is still rich.

VERD. You mean? (*Slight pause, and then suddenly.*)
I'll not do it.

JIM (*quickly*). Not do what?

VERD. I've wronged you, Lyons. She's your wife in the sight of God and man. I'll sacrifice myself for her. I'll leave her for you. You can win her love again. Good-bye.

(*Starts up.*)

JIM (*in a rage*). What! (*Rushes at VERD., drags him down C., much against his will. VERD. struggles.*) You shan't go away.

VERD. Don't you understand? I am sacrificing my very heart and soul, my life, my love. Good-bye! (*Struggles.*)

JIM (*unable to hold him longer, stands before the door and cries*). Reba!

(REBA *enters from R., fully dressed with coat and large yellow hat.*)

REBA. Why did you call me? Do you want to insult me again? Or do you want to borrow some more of my money?

VERD. (*protestingly*). Reba!

REBA (*paying no attention*). You'll never have another chance. (*Takes candy box and crossing to practical door, opens it.*) I'm tired of living with a man who doesn't know me—whom I don't know. I'll no longer live in a Doll's House. (*Dramatically.*) I'm going to close the door like Mrs. Fiske.

VERD. But Reba —

REBA (*seizing him*). I'll go with you—to live in your Land of Love's Delight. The highway of Love is beckoning me! Come!

(*She sweeps VERD. out of practical door and slams it dramatically.*)

JIM (*seated R. C., staring in front of him with tense fixed look. Pause. The outer door slams. A great change passes over his face. Heaves a sigh of relief, then smiles broadly, then laughs, then in uncontrolled laughter lies back in chair with his sides shaking*). The Land of Love's Delight. Poor Verdier! And he's a poet, too. (*Laughs.*) A poet and

Reba! (*Enters telephone booth.*) Hello, Central. 6722—Party X—Green. (*Pause.*) No. 6722. Yes, thank you. (*Pause.* REBA *enters hurriedly, crosses to her room at R. and exits.*) Hello, Jake. (*Pause.*) No, I want Mr. Jay Van Sickle. Is this 6722—Party X—Green? Oh, wrong number. Beg pardon. Hello, Central. Central! For Heaven's sake! What the — Hello, Central. Yes, you made a mistake. I wanted 6722—Party X—Green. (*Reënter REBA from R. with two enormous jewel caskets. She hurriedly examines jewels at table and locks each box.*) Hello, Jake—this is Jim. Everything's all right. The scheme worked to a fare-thee-well! Reba has left for good. (*REBA hears, pauses, comes near booth and listens.*) Can you put me up on the boat to-night? (*Pause.*) Great! The very thing. We can sail to-morrow. Ready? Why, I'm ready now. (*Pause.*) Sure, it's settled. No trouble at all. The slickest thing I ever did. (*Pause.*) Congratulations? Much obliged. I'm going to write a book, "How to Get Rid of a Wife." I'll be with you in an hour. You've got to promise though that we won't see a woman's face on the whole trip. (*Pause.*) Sure thing. Good-bye.

(*Comes from the booth and is confronted by REBA standing c., like a Goddess of Vengeance, her breast heaving.*)

REBA (*in a hollow voice*). It—was—a—trick!

JIM (*nonplussed*). Why did you come back?

REBA (*holding up the jewel casket while the storm gathers*). I'm glad I did come back. It has shown you in your true despicable nature, Jim Lyons. I hate you. Paul is there waiting—the man that I love—the man who loves me; but do you think I am going with him? No, Jim Lyons, I am going to stay right here. I'll show you how to get rid of a wife. I'm here and not all the world can take you from me. (*Crosses quickly to booth. Rings. JIM watches apprehensively.*) Hello, Central. Please give me 6722—Party X—Green. (*Exit JIM, R., very quietly.*) Hello, is this Mr. Van Sickle? This is Mrs. Jim Lyons. Yes, Reba Lyons. Reba Cohan Lyons. (*Pause.*) Oh, yes, I'm at home. I just wanted to apologize to you for Jim's atrocious joke. I'm afraid he carried it too far. He's standing right here by me. He says that he wanted to see how gullible you were. (*Reënter JIM from R., with coat, hat and grip. He tiptoes across stage and exits c.*) No, you know what it means to have a professional humorist for a bosom

friend. I wish you a pleasant voyage, Mr. Van Sickle. And so does Jim. Good-bye. (*Comes from booth.*) Now, you see. (*Looks around in amazement. She exits R. quickly. Pause. Door R. slams as she is supposed to go from room to room. A faint cry of "Jim!" is heard and then she reënters at R.*) The coward, the coward. (*Goes to window and calls.*) Paul! The taxi! It's gone! (*Rushes out C. D. Pause. She reënters C. D.*) He's gone!

(*Gives sigh. Takes off hat and coat and tosses them R. Crosses to L. with box of chocolates and seats herself at L., as she appeared at beginning of play. She selects a very large chocolate and nibbles contentedly as the curtain falls.*)

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MR. MALACHI MEEK, *a lively old gentleman of sixty-nine.*

MR. DUN, *the burglar.*

MISS AMY LEE, *about to be married.*

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SYNOPSIS

ACT I. The lawn at Mrs. Perrington-Shine's country home.

ACT II. The library at 8:00 P. M. A thief in the house.

ACT III. The same library at 11:00 P. M. Trouble for the burglar.

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